U.S. Extended Continental Shelf (ECS) Fact Sheet

What is the U.S. ECS Project?

The ECS project is a multi-agency collaboration with the goal of establishing the full extent of the U.S. continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles, consistent with international law.

How is the ECS determined?

Determining the outer limits of the U.S. ECS requires the collection and analysis of data that describe the depth, shape and geophysical characteristics of the seabed and sub-seafloor. There are two formulas, the sediment thickness formula and the bathymetric formula, that can be used alone or in combination to define the outer limits of the continental shelf.

What data are required?

A variety of datasets will be used to analyze the seafloor, including bathymetry, seismic reflection and refraction data, magnetic and gravity data and geologic samples.

What data has been collected?

Since 2003, U.S. agencies have been collecting data for the ECS Project (including four joint Arctic cruises with Canada):

- 27 cruises collecting 1.8 million km^2 of bathymetric data
- 6 cruises collecting 18,000 linear km of seismic data

☆ *Given the size of the U.S. continental shelf, resources found could be worth many billions if not trillions of dollars.*

Why is it important?

- Preliminary studies indicate the U.S. ECS may total at least one million square kilometers (about twice the size of California).
- Declaring our ECS will ensure U.S. sovereign rights to protect and manage our energy and mineral resources.

What is NOAA/NGDC's role?

- Support data analysis
- Manage, integrate, analyze and archive data

For additional information, please see: http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/mgg/ecs/

Ships *Healy* and *Louis St. Laurent* during joint Arctic cruise with Canada

Scientists and Coast Guard Crew dredging for rock samples onboard the USCGC *Healy* in the Arctic